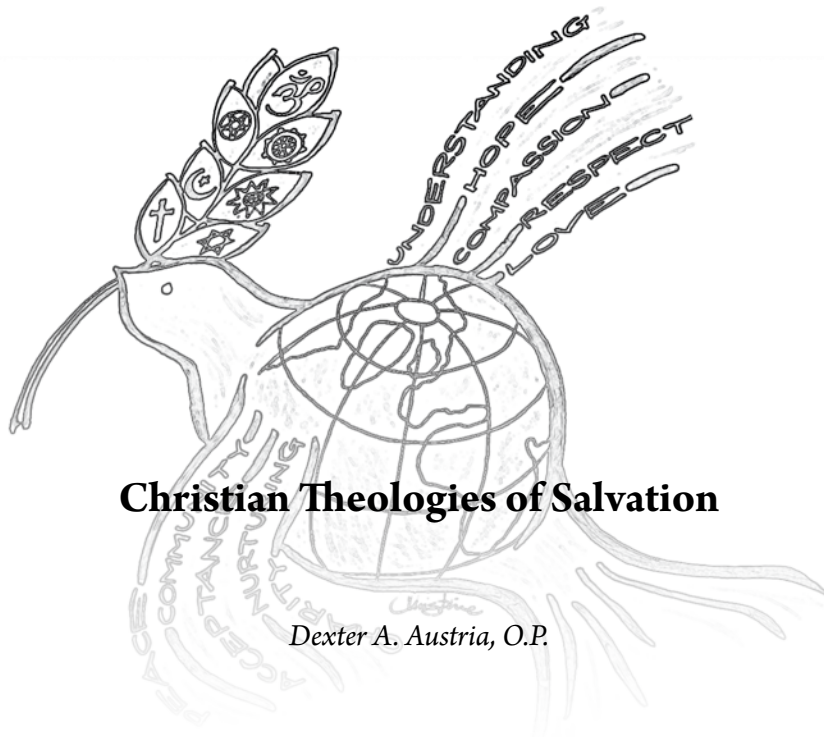




Christian Theologies of Salvation

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Who do you say that I am? (Matthew 16:15, New American Bible)

This was the question Jesus asked his Apostles for their opinion with regard to his identity. Simon Peter, as the spokesman of the Twelve, stood up and said, "You are the Christ, the Son of the Living God."

And rightly so, the prompt answer and confession of Peter resounded for many centuries of Christian faith. However, the Church established by Christ was not the stand-alone religion of peoples from all times and places.

Plurality of faiths rose and have caused different ideologies to clash and most of the time lead to wars between them.

This article, *Christian Theologies of Salvation*, presents to us varying perspectives on how one looks at Christ as source of salvation for men. Differing opinions even from Christian denominations show heterogeneous answers to this one basic but complex question: *Is Christ the sole savior of all?*

The first part deals with a survey of these Christian Theologies of Salvation. Exclusivism deals with absolute certainty of Christ as the full and complete revelation of God and for whom all people are saved. Avoiding this outright rejection of other opinion, inclusivism presents some possibility of salvation outside the Church, not limiting it to Christ alone. Lastly, pluralism takes on a complete turn when it takes Christ out of the center and put him alongside the many revealers and saviors of the world.

The second part deals with Christian Theology of Religious Pluralism as proposed by Jacques Dupuis in doing inter-faith dialogue. For him, while maintaining

the centrality of concrete figure of Christ, religions do take a positive role in the over-all plan of God for man.

Keywords: *Exclusivism, Inclusivism, Pluralism, Christian Theology of Religious Pluralism, Revelation, Salvation, Trinitarian Christological Paradigm, Inter-faith Dialogue*

With the advent of modernity, when people get to interact more with one another, not only within communities and societies, but more so, on a global scale, various cultures and faiths previously separated, have now encountered one another. This global phenomenon has precluded isolation of cultures and faiths.

Plurality of faiths and cultures should not and cannot be ignored. Eastern cultures, including its vast arrays of beliefs, meet their counterpart in the West and vice versa. This impact created a double-edged effect: one, beneficial; the other, detrimental. On the one hand, the impact has in fact made the world smaller as peoples, faiths and cultures interact and dialogue with each other, thus in a way creating harmony and unity. On the other hand, this same impact has also caused different ideologies and principles of cultures and even of faiths to clash with each other, creating a cataclysmic effect of wars and persecutions.

In this sense, the Church, well aware of this phenomenon, gradually opened her doors to other faiths in Vatican Council II, to study and dialogue with them. While other faiths are open for dialogue, they are not comfortable with issues regarding Christ, his revelation of God and his offer of salvation to all. The Church meanwhile, while open to dialogue, still adheres to her traditional understanding regarding Christ, the sole Revelation of God and the one Savior of all. Thus, opinions abound to reformulate or at least reinterpret some basic Christological doctrines to fit in program for dialogue.

With Christological-Soteriological issues at the helm, theologians in mission territories were prompted to explore possibilities and propose paradigms on how the Church could effectively meet and dialogue with other world faiths.

This article presents two parts: A. Survey, Evaluation and Critique of Christian Theologies of Salvation: 1. Exclusivism, 2. Inclusivism and 3. Pluralism, centering on Christological-Soteriological issues; and B. Christian Theology of Religious Pluralism by Jacques Dupuis, as proposed way of doing inter-faith dialogue.

Survey, Evaluation and Critique of Christian Theologies of Salvation

1. *Exclusivism*

Exclusivism, as the name suggests, affirms the exclusivity and absoluteness of a particular doctrine or truth-claim. Such that, if applied in a Christological-Soteriological sense, Jesus Christ is considered to be the full and complete revelation of God and through whom all peoples, regardless of which faith they belong, are to be saved. Scripture based, it asserts that God has revealed himself completely in Jesus,

In times past, God spoke in fragmentary and varied ways to our fathers through the prophets; in this the final age, he has spoken to us through his Son, whom he has made heir of all things and through whom he first created the universe (Hebrews 1:1-2).

It also argues that salvation of men can only come through Jesus. Referring to him thus, “[t]here is no salvation in anyone else, for there is no other name in the whole world given to men by which we are to be saved (Acts 4:12).” Moreover, exclusivism believes that Jesus Christ is “the sole criterion by which all religions, including Christianity, should be understood and evaluated.”¹ Since it is only in Christ that we find the fullness of revelation and salvation, claims of other mediators of revelation and salvation are considered to be incomplete, if not outright false.

1.1 *Karl Barth*

Among the notable proponents of exclusivism, Karl Barth is said to be the most influential embodiment of exclusivist paradigm. Barth argues for the primacy of Christ in revelation and salvation above anything and anyone else. Barth says of salvation through reconciliation with God and revelation are of the same thing. He says thus, “that reconciliation is also revelation is first and decisively event and reality in Him who is its Mediator and Accomplisher in His own person.”² Barth argues that in the Person of Jesus as God-Man, both revelation and salvation are realized and fulfilled. Furthermore, he says of Christ as *the* light of life (emphasizing on the definite article *the*) that shines above all cultures and religions. He explains thus,

¹ Shenk, Calvin. *Who Do You Say that I Am? Christians Encounter Other Religions* (Scottsdale, Pa.: Herald Press, 1997), 35.

² Barth, Karl. *Church Dogmatics*. Vol. 4, Part 3, First Half, *The Doctrine of Reconciliation*, trans. from German, Rev. Prof. G. W. Bromiley, D. Litt., D.D. (Edinburgh: T. & T. Clark, 1962), 38.

“Positively, this means that He is the light of life in all its fullness, in perfect adequacy; and negatively, it means that there is no other light of life outside or alongside His, outside or alongside the light which He is.”³

Clearly, Barth states that exclusivity and absoluteness of Jesus Christ as the light of God and the revelation of God.

Meanwhile, in dealing with other faiths, Barth noted that “other lights” of revelation and salvation seem to occur in them. However, he is quick to qualify that “these other lights” are not the self-revelation of God himself.

“Thus we are not to think in the first instance of the light of the resurrection of Jesus Christ, nor of His truth as it is to be known in the power of the Holy Spirit, nor of the light of His self-attestation in the word of His prophets and apostles, nor of the extraordinary self-attestations of Jesus Christ in world history...”⁴

Barth says of these “other lights” as they “prevent the world from being merely dark, or being plunged into absolute gloom by the sin of man. To them we owe it that in the distinctive darkness of the world (as compared with the light of God) and in the gloom caused by the sin of man, there is still a measure of brightness.”⁵

Nonetheless, these “other lights” must totally not to be confused with the Light of Christ.

“As words of terrestrial being, they [the ‘other lights’] are only terrestrial words and as truths of terrestrial being, they are only terrestrial truths. They are not then, divine disclosures nor eternal truths.”⁶

1.2 Evaluation

Exclusivism calls for a strong conviction, confession and focus on Jesus Christ as the final and absolute Revelation of God and Savior of all. Evangelization as proclamation of Christ as Lord is a necessary task for the Church to be faithful to the Gospel teaching.

While it emphasizes the finality and primacy of Christ among all others, it still opens up “the possibility of a variety of narratives moving toward him as the

³ Ibid, 86.

⁴ Ibid, 136.

⁵ Ibid, 141.

⁶ Ibid, 141.

end.”⁷ Sumner adds an implicit explanation of Barth: “the image of a center, Christ, defining its periphery in concentric circles, which in an ordered fashion, trail off from the center itself.”⁸

However, critics argue that such treatment of Christ as *the* Light, i.e., the authentic and sole revealer of God and savior of all, while leaving others defined only as “other lights” – still all pointing to that of the Light and thereby, not recognizing them as parallel, suggests narrow-mindedness, arrogance and insensitivity to other faiths. Thus, this paradigm is considered a roadblock for a true and sincere dialogue between faiths.

2. *Inclusivism*

In an attempt to avoid the all-exclusive revelation and salvation in Christ, inclusivism argues for “the possibility of salvation outside [the] Christian faith or outside the walls of the visible church, but the agent of such salvation is Christ and the revelation in Jesus is definitive and normative for assessing that salvation.”⁹

Inclusivism argues that God has revealed himself and has offered salvation to everyone, regardless of one’s faith-tradition. Such that, the possibility of revelation of God and salvation is not limited to Christ alone, or to the latter’s followers, peoples from other faiths benefit from this as well. However, this is always because of Christ, through Christ and in relationship with Christ.

Inclusivism acknowledges that God’s saving presence impacts a wider world than the exclusivistic paradigm, of which the latter revolves around Christ and Christian faith alone. With inclusivism, the faith of non-Christians is seen to have a positive saving potential value as it serves as “preparation of the Gospel, nonetheless, bringing all peoples to Christ.”¹⁰

In all cases, Christ still serves as the guiding point towards revelation of God and salvation. If there is any revealing and truth-saving presence in other faiths, they are all coming from Christ. Although God’s revealing and saving mystery is made available to all and is never attained by anyone apart from Christ.

⁷ Sumner, George. *The First and the Last. The Claim of Jesus Christ and the Claims of Other Religious Traditions* (Grand Rapids, Michigan: William B. Eerdmans Publishing Company, 2004), 75.

⁸ Ibid, 73.

⁹ Shenk, 43.

¹⁰ Ibid.

2.1 Karl Rahner

Said to present “the classic example of the inclusivist” position because of his theory of the “anonymous Christian,” Karl Rahner has received much attention for this paradigm.¹¹ In Volume VI of his book, *Theological Investigations*, he acknowledges the universal will of God to reveal himself to all peoples and save man, regardless of faith and still points to Jesus as man’s ultimate goal. He says that man has “unlimited openness for the limitless being of God.”¹² In other words, man is capable of transcending in himself the divine mystery of God. Understanding Rahner, Sumner explains, “already in human ‘nature’ God’s ‘grace’ is at work so that humans themselves are beings open to the mystery of God...”¹³

Rahner understands that “man is he who realizes himself when he gives himself away into the incomprehensible mystery of God. Seen in this way, the incarnation of God is the uniquely supreme case of the actualization of man’s nature in general.”¹⁴ From here, what is seen is man looking up to Christ as he recognizes in himself his ordination toward him. These Grace of God at work in man and incarnation are said to be the “two basic modes of man’s spiritual being, beyond his powers to compel and yet precisely as such eminently fulfilling the transcendence of his being.”¹⁵

This movement of man to Christ is being experienced by all, regardless of faith. Such that “any revelation of grace, man always experiences it implicitly in the depths of his being.”¹⁶ In other words, when man accepts himself completely, he is also “accepting Christ as the absolute perfection and guarantee of his own anonymous movement toward God by grace and the acceptance of this belief is again not an act of man alone but the work of God’s grace which is the grace of Christ.”¹⁷ In his acceptance of himself, man has an innate relationship with Christ and has in fact encountered him at least anonymously.

We may go further and say that many people have in fact encountered Christ without knowing that they were in contact with the one whose life and death was their own redeemed fate. They have encountered, although they did not know it, the one whom Christians rightly call Jesus of Nazareth.¹⁸

¹¹ Kilby, Karen. *Karl Rahner. Theology and Philosophy* (New Fetter Lane, London: Routledge, 2004), 115.

¹² Rahner, Karl. *Theological Investigation* (Baltimore: Helicon Press, 1961), 392.

¹³ Sumner, 77.

¹⁴ Rahner, *TI*, 393.

¹⁵ *Ibid*, 393.

¹⁶ *Ibid*, 394.

¹⁷ *Ibid*, 394.

¹⁸ Rahner, Karl and Wilhelm Thusing. *A New Christology* (New York: The Seabury Press, 1980), 16.

2.2 Evaluation

Unlike in the previous exclusivist paradigm, knowledge and faith-conviction in Jesus Christ are more implicit than explicit in this paradigm. God's salvific action is offered freely to man even without having an explicit faith and commitment to Christ and those saved are not saved because of their faith, but in spite of their faith. It is still Christ who has won one's salvation, whether one acknowledges it or not.

However, critics argue that on the one hand, too much emphasis is given to the universal or cosmic Christ, such that all peoples, regardless of faith, implicitly encounter Christ. On the other hand, there is little emphasis on the historical Christ such that the mystery and unique role of incarnation is greatly diminished.¹⁹

Moreover, Rahner's term of "anonymous Christian" seems to be coercive to non-Christians who may not want to follow and confess Jesus Christ as their savior and yet implicitly, according to this paradigm, they do so. This indeed may create a barrier for an open and sincere dialogue with other faiths.²⁰

With regard to the missionary activity of the Church, though they acknowledge this as important aspect of the Church's evangelization process, inclusivists agree that this is not primarily aimed at conversion of peoples to Christian faith, but rather aimed in a fruitful and meaningful conversation - informing them that they are already saved by Christ. Hence, the task is not to offer Christ to other faiths, but rather for peoples of other faiths "to discover and unveil the [hidden] Christ present in them."²¹

However, in not explicitly proclaiming Christ to the world, critics argue that the missionary activity of the Church will lose its urgency, if not its necessity. Given that, if Christ has indeed saved everyone, without even having an explicit profession of faith in him, there is no sense in doing mission-proclamation of Christ at all.²²

Lastly, quoting Joseph DiNoia, Sumner argues that, "Inclusivist positions [of which Rahner's is exemplary] imply that the affective and intellectual dispositions fostered by different religious communities in fact promote the attainment and enjoyment, not of the aims of life they commend to their members, but of the aims of life they commend by the Christian community."²³ This suggests that the term

¹⁹ Shenk, 50.

²⁰ Ibid, 50-51.

²¹ Ibid, 48-49.

²² Ibid, 52.

²³ Sumner, 80 quoting Joseph DiNoia. *The Diversity of Religions: A Christian Perspective* (Washington, D.C.: Catholic University Press, 1992), 55.

“anonymous Christian” may mean for one’s faith an abandonment of its aim of life, only in preference for the Christian faith’s aim.

3. *Pluralism*

In a stark contrast with the two previous paradigms, which affirm an explicit (exclusivism) and implicit (inclusivism) faith-commitment to Christ, the third paradigm moves Christ further away from the center and places him alongside the many mediators to revelation and salvation. Recognizing the plurality of faiths in the world, pluralism argues that each faith has its own revealer and savior, moving towards the Ultimate Goal; each being equal in value, true and valid towards the Goal. Christ is then positioned alongside the many mediators, as one among the many. Thus, applied to religions, Jesus Christ’s significance as revealer of God and savior is limited to Christians, as Buddha to Buddhists, Vishnu to Hinduists and Mohammad to Muslims.

In pluralism, advocates believe that no single faith has the monopoly of truth and that no single mediator has the assurance of salvation for all faiths. There can be no absolute or universal truth. Pluralism argues that each faith has its own truth - a relative or subjective truth, all equally and independently valid. Christ, though he also reveals and saves, is restricted to Christians and cannot absolutely and fully exhaust all truths about God because he is just one of the many mediators of salvation.

3.1 *John Hick*

One of the leading proponents of this paradigm is John Hick who formulated his notion around the concept of “Copernican revolution” in theology. He says, “Copernican revolution in theology must involve an equally radical transformation of our conception of the universe of faiths and the place of our religion within it.” Applying it in theology, he advocated rather a God-centered theology (Theocentrism) instead of a Christ-centered theology (Christocentrism) [as expressed by the earlier paradigms of exclusivism and inclusivism]. He believed that all faiths should revolve around God instead of Christ.

Accordingly, with the publication of his essay in “God and the Universe of Faiths” in 1973, Hick spoke of “a shift from the dogma that Christianity is at the center, to the realization that it is God who is at the center and that all religions of mankind, including our own, serve and revolve around him.”

Consequently, Christ is placed up to par with other mediators, who tend to “orbit” around God at the center, making the uniqueness and particularity of Christ as the sole revealer of God and savior of all, limited to those who believe in him, i.e.

Christians. In such case, other faiths also have their own revealers and saviors, e.g. Mohammad for the Muslims and Buddha for the Buddhists.

Further, Hick challenged the Christian understanding of him as the Incarnation of God. He says of incarnation as a “scandal of particularity or a scandal of restricted access”²⁴ of which only a few would have benefited from God’s revelation and salvation. This would be in contradiction with God’s expression of limitless love for the whole of mankind.

He says that incarnation is only a myth, meant to evoke a particular attitude in the Christian believers, of which God only becomes active in Jesus and in the Christian faith. It does not imply a literal meaning of God becoming man in the flesh. Jesus’ incarnation has to do only with God’s active presence in him.

The idea of the incarnation of God in the life of Jesus, so understood, is thus not a metaphysical claim about Jesus having two natures, but a metaphorical statement of the significance of a life through which God was acting on earth... the idea of incarnation communicates something of momentous importance about Jesus, something that forms the basis of distinctively Christian experience and faith.²⁵

In later years, he sensed a need to decenter God, acknowledging a more profound divine mystery, which could entirely embrace all faiths. He proposed to call this mystery – “the Real.” With this notion, Hick recognizes each faith being an equally valid response of man to this mystery. Hick clarifies,

The Real is the ‘noumenal’ ground of the encountered gods and experienced absolutes witnessed to by the religious traditions.²⁶

Thus, with this notion of the Real, Heim sees two important elements of Hick’s proposal: “[one] all major religions are salvifically effective, [two] all have real cognitive content.”²⁷ This means that all faiths have their own truth element, recognizing them as “varied responses to the Real.”²⁸

Nonetheless, Hick does not call Christians to abandon their loyalty and faith-commitment to Christ. In fact, he encourages Christians to strengthen their absolute faith in Jesus Christ as Revelation of God and their Savior. This is as long as

²⁴ Hick, John. *The Metaphor of God Incarnate. Christology in a Pluralistic Age* (Louisville, Kentucky: Westminster / John Knox Press, 1993), 154.

²⁵ Ibid, 106.

²⁶ Hick, John. *An Interpretation of Religion: Human Responses to the Transcendent* (London: Macmillan Press, 1989), 21 as quoted by Mark Heim, *Salvations: Truth and Difference in Religion* (New York: Orbis Books, 1995), 15.

²⁷ Ibid.

²⁸ Ibid, 22.

they also recognize and respect their non-Christian counterparts who also have their own equally legitimate objects of ultimate devotion and commitment - each being subordinated to “the Infinite Real.”

3.2 Evaluation

Pluralism, in its recognition of plurality of faiths, accords the revelation of God and salvation not to a single revealer or savior for all, but to a multitude, so that each faith has its own mediator. Following that line, all mediators, including Christ, are all equal in value, considered true and valid in their assertions. This third paradigm still accepts Jesus Christ as true and valid revealer of God and savior, but only for his followers. Christ is just one among several mediators.

In this paradigm, critics argue that the missionary activity of the Church is deemed unnecessary, if not rejected at all, since all mediators for man and God are equally true and valid. There is no sense of mission if all faiths are true and valid by themselves. Thereby, a Christian proclamation of Christ seems imperialistic and imposing to other faiths. If inter-faith dialogue is considered, it is only taken as a discussion among faiths and never beyond that. Respect of differences is a primary value in this dialogue. No coercion, conversion, or changing of one faith to another is allowed. Pluralism renders meaningless the missionary impulse in Christianity. To be “in mission” means that one is convinced that he or she has something good to share. The compulsion is not to conquer but share something good. Pluralism assumes that what one has to share is already present in the other, though in a different way. To attempt to share one’s faith is a superfluity, if not another form of colonizing the other.

While pluralism seems to be in accord with post-modernity’s fascination with multiple truths and abhorrence of dogma, it also espouses another kind of subtle *dogmatism*: pluralists readily assume without existential involvement, that the other religious figures out and paths are *equal* to Christ and Christianity.

Christian Theology of Religious Pluralism

Attempting to find the middle ground between the paradigms of pluralism and inclusivism, Jacques Dupuis,²⁹ in his book, “Toward a Christian Theology of

²⁹ Jacques Dupuis is a Belgian Jesuit, who, in his teaching experience at Calcutta, India, had discovered aspects of Hinduism which made him question the self revelation of God necessarily passing through the person of Jesus Christ.

Religious Pluralism,”³⁰ tries to discover “a positive Christian evaluation of these [religious] traditions that coincide with God’s universal plan, looking at the unique and central role in which the historical event of Christ takes part in that plan.”³¹ In other words, Dupuis proposes a paradigm in which these religious traditions can take positive roles in the revelatory and salvific plan of God, while maintaining the centrality of the role of Christ.

However, four years after it was first published, the Congregation for the Doctrine of the Faith (CDF), gave the author the *Notification* for some “notable ambiguities and difficulties on important doctrinal points”³² of which succeeding “prints or further editions of the book should necessarily include it.”³³ In the following, the researcher presents these “ambiguous” doctrinal points mentioning particularly those that concern Christological and Soteriological issues. The researcher has divided³⁴ these Christological and Soteriological points of Jacques Dupuis into three: on the Revelation of Jesus Christ, on the salvific mediation of Jesus Christ and on the Divine Word and Incarnate Word. Likewise, the researcher mentions the Trinitarian-Christological Paradigm of Dupuis, which for the latter, could finally incorporate both the role of Christ and the role of the religious traditions in the one, universal plan of God, opening the greater possibility of a fulfillment of an inter-religious dialogue.

1. Christological-Soteriological Issues

1.1 On the Revelation of Jesus Christ

Dupuis recognizes the role of religious traditions of the world giving “different insights into the mystery of Ultimate Reality.”³⁵ They give “witness to a manifold self-manifestation of God to human beings in diverse faith-communities.”³⁶ This Divine Mystery is completed in Jesus, “the one human face in whom God, while remaining unseen, is fully disclosed and revealed.”³⁷ In other words, although recognizing Christ

³⁰ Dupuis, Jacques. *Toward a Christian Theology of Religious Pluralism* (New York: Orbis Books, 1997).

³¹ Ibid, 22-23.

³² *Notification on the book Toward a Christian Theology of Religious Pluralism* (Orbis Books: Maryknoll, New York 1997) by Father Jacques Dupuis, S.J. (Vatican City, 24 January 2001), http://www.vatican.va/roman_curia/congregations/cfaith/documents/rc_con_cfaith_doc_20010124_dupuis_en.html], accessed December 2010.

³³ Ibid.

³⁴ The researcher based the division according to the outline posted in the Notification.

³⁵ Dupuis, 279.

³⁶ Ibid.

³⁷ Ibid, 283.

as the fullness of revelation, Dupuis noted the role of the different religious traditions of the world as authentic witnesses of God's self-manifestation, albeit incomplete.

Furthermore, Jacques Dupuis clarified that this "fullness of revelation" referred to Christ is not a matter of quantity but of quality.³⁸ We look at the "fullness" not as a matter of absoluteness and finality — as if God has not revealed himself to other religious tradition and to Christ alone — but that we owe the term "fullness" to the conscious identity of Jesus Christ as the Son of God. As the Second Person of Trinity, Christ has a direct communication and knowledge of the Father, proper and unique to him alone. In this argument, we say that no other religious tradition can possibly surpass or even equal God's self-manifestation to Christ.

His human consciousness of being the Son entailed an immediate knowledge of his Father, whom he called Abba. Thus, his revelation of God had its point of departure in a unique, unsurpassable human experience.³⁹

Though unique, however, this revelation of God to Jesus is deemed not absolute. It still remains relative. Jesus' consciousness, while identified with that of the Second Person of the Holy Trinity, is still a human consciousness and therefore a limited one. With this limitation, Jesus can never exhaust the knowledge of God, which in itself is limitless.

No human consciousness, even the human consciousness of the Son of God, can exhaust the Divine Mystery.⁴⁰

Thus, God's self-revelation is never hindered in the unique but not absolute manifestation of himself to Christ and is made available to all religious traditions.

"The qualitative fullness of the revelation in Jesus Christ is no obstacle, even after the historical event, to a continuing divine self-revelation... No revelation, however, either before or after Christ, can either surpass or equal the one vouchsafed in Jesus Christ, the divine Son incarnate."⁴¹

1.2 On the Salvific Mediation of Jesus Christ

Dupuis argues for a radical reinterpretation for the claim of unicity and universality of Christ's mediation in the Christian Tradition. He refuses to interpret it as absolute (exclusivism) — as if there are no mediators outside him and relative (pluralism) — as if all mediators are valid and equal to him. Dupuis stresses Christ's

³⁸ Ibid, 249.

³⁹ Ibid.

⁴⁰ Ibid.

⁴¹ Ibid, 249-250.

unique and universal importance in God's saving mystery, but this is to be understood not in terms of an "absolute" significance, but only as a "constitutive relational" significance - insofar as it is necessary for the salvation of man and that it is able "to insert [itself to] the overall design of God which is multifaceted."⁴²

He says that on the one hand, the claim is constitutive because, in it, we see "the universal impact of the Paschal Mystery of Christ, bringing about the salvation of man."⁴³ In other words, we see in Christ's suffering and death on the cross, though not deemed as an absolute mediation of salvation, as a necessary action on the part of God to save man, regardless of which religious tradition he adheres.

On the other hand, the claim is also relational, in the sense that, "it is able to assert the reciprocal relationship that exists between the path that is Jesus Christ and the various paths to salvation proposed by the religious traditions to their members."⁴⁴ In other words, although the incarnation of God in Christ "marks the deepest and most decisive engagement of God with humankind,"⁴⁵ this also marks the historical undertaking of the Paschal event, which in itself is limited, but is able to relate to all manifestations of God to man.

Dupuis stresses that the only final agent of human salvation is God. God, himself an Infinite Reality, is the Absolute Savior. "God – and God alone – saves."⁴⁶ Jesus Christ, though himself the Incarnate Word, is savior "only in derivative manner"⁴⁷ – through Christ, God saves the world. Here, he quotes the Second Letter of St. Paul to the Corinthians, "In Christ, God was reconciling the world to himself (2 Cor. 5: 19)"⁴⁸

Nevertheless, God allows and even wills that his saving mystery be concretely seen and accomplished in Christ. Dupuis says,

Salvation is at work everywhere; but in the concrete figure of the crucified Christ, the work of salvation is to be accomplished.⁴⁹

In Christ, we see God's saving mystery taking place in the concrete history of man. In Christ, we see God acting for the salvation of man. In Christ, we see God's

⁴² Ibid, 283.

⁴³ Ibid, 303.

⁴⁴ Ibid, 305.

⁴⁵ Ibid, 388.

⁴⁶ Ibid, 306.

⁴⁷ Ibid.

⁴⁸ Ibid.

⁴⁹ Ibid, 328.

saving mystery attains its “highest and most sacramental visibility.”⁵⁰ However, much to this visible saving activity of God, Jacques Dupuis laments that this manifestation “reaches only the ears of the Christian faithful.”⁵¹

Yet accordingly, God’s universal saving mystery is “one and at the same time multifaceted.”⁵² It allows participated forms of mediation, in which other religious traditions can share with Christians. Thus, God becomes present to other people of religious traditions in the very practice of their own faith. “Their own religious practice is the reality that gives expression to their experience of God and of the mystery of Christ.”⁵³ Though multifaceted, this God’s saving mystery “never prescind[s] from the Christ-event, in which it finds its highest historical destiny.”⁵⁴ Dupuis echoes in part, the passage from the encyclical *Redemptoris Missio*, “[t]hese participated forms of mediation acquire meaning and only from Christ’s own mediation.”⁵⁵

1.3 Divine Word and Incarnate Word

For Dupuis, in the mystery of Christ, there exists the Eternal Word (the Word that existed before and after the historical Christ) and the Incarnate Word (the Word that became flesh). Although he acknowledged the inseparability of the two, they nevertheless remain different from each other. Such that “while the human action of the Logos *ensarkos* [Incarnate Word] is the universal sacrament of God’s saving action, it does not exhaust the action of the Logos [Eternal Word].”⁵⁶ In other words, while the Paschal Mystery of the Incarnate Word is a sure and effective sign or sacrament of God’s salvific will to man, it should not also hinder “the saving activity” of the Eternal Word which “enlightens religious traditions pointing to salvation for their followers, in accordance with God’s over-all design for humankind.”⁵⁷ Further, the Eternal Logos continues to be “the expression of God’s superabundant graciousness and absolute freedom”⁵⁸ even after the incarnation of the Logos, as it “lays the foundation for the recognition of a pluralism in God’s way of dealing with humankind.”⁵⁹

⁵⁰ Ibid, 318.

⁵¹ Ibid.

⁵² Ibid, 316.

⁵³ Ibid, 319.

⁵⁴ Ibid, 316.

⁵⁵ Ibid, 321 as quoted from *Redemptoris Missio*. *Encyclical letter on the Church Renewed Missionary Mandate* (Rome: December 1990), 5.

⁵⁶ Ibid, 299.

⁵⁷ Ibid, 298.

⁵⁸ Ibid, 299.

⁵⁹ Ibid, 321.

Thus, although Dupuis acknowledges Incarnation of God in Jesus as “the culminating point of the process of divine self-communication,”⁶⁰ proper to Christ alone as the unique Son of God, he nevertheless would not allow incarnation to obscure the presence and active of the Eternal Logos, of which he considers more universal.

2. Trinitarian Christological Paradigm

In God’s self-manifestation and universal saving will to man, Dupuis proposes a Trinitarian Christological paradigm that would finally embrace the unique role assigned to Christ and the role in which the religious traditions play in God’s saving plan.

First, he adopts the Christian understanding the Christ-event as “the pivot upon which the entire history of the dialogue between God and humanity turns, the principle of intelligibility of the divine plan concretized in the history of the world.”⁶¹ Yet he clarified that the centrality of Christ (Christocentrism) must not be confused with an absolute Christ (Christomonism); the latter closing its doors to the role of the various religious traditions. Dupuis indicated that the Christ-event, rather than made exclusive in God’s saving mystery, “supposes, call forth and enhances the universal operative presence of the ‘Word of God’ and of the ‘Spirit of God’ though salvation history and, specifically, in the religious traditions of humankind.”⁶²

Accordingly, the Old Testament tradition refers to the “divine Wisdom-Word and the divine Spirit serving as “medium” for God’s personal interventions in history,”⁶³ while the New Testament later unfolds “the true personhood of the media of God’s involvement in human history by progressively delving into the personal character of the Son (Logos-Wisdom) and of the Spirit.”⁶⁴ Thus, we see the presence of God (as the Trinity- Logos and the Spirit) since the beginning of time, though the “operative presence (of God) was (still) to culminate in his coming in the flesh in Jesus Christ.”⁶⁵

In Dupuis’ analysis of salvation history of man, the combined actions of the Logos, the Spirit and the historical Christ are inseparable yet distinct aspects of the economy of salvation. Dupuis’ Trinitarian Christological paradigm claims that “there

⁶⁰ Ibid, 300.

⁶¹ Ibid, 221.

⁶² Ibid.

⁶³ Ibid.

⁶⁴ Ibid, 221.

⁶⁵ Ibid.

exists a relationship of mutual conditioning, by virtue of which no singular aspect can either be stressed to the detriment of the other or, on the contrary, played down in favor of them. The Christ-event never stands in isolation from the working of the Logos and the Spirit, any more than these ever operate without relation to it.”⁶⁶

Therefore, in God’s self-manifestation to various faiths, the universal presence of both the Logos and Spirit is at work and is made visible to them. In reference to the Document, *Dialogue and Proclamation*,⁶⁷ of the Pontifical Council for Inter-religious dialogue, Dupuis avers that “truth and grace found elsewhere must not be reduced to “seeds” or “stepping-stones” simply to be nurtured or used and then superseded in Christian revelation ... More divine truth and grace are found operative in the entire history of God’s dealings with humankind than are available simply in the Christian tradition.”⁶⁸

3. Jacques Dupuis and Inter-faith Dialogue

Following the argument that if God willed to manifest himself to religious traditions, other than the Christian faith through Christ, then “followers of other religious traditions, who have belonged to the Kingdom of God in history without being members of the Church, can at the end of time share in the fullness of the Kingdom...”⁶⁹ These common sharing and building of the Kingdom of God by all religious traditions “constitute the deepest foundation for inter-faith dialogue between Christians and others.”⁷⁰

However, Dupuis laments, “[although] the [Vatican] council made a vibrant appeal in favor of dialogue with the members of other religious traditions, nowhere it is said that council considers inter-faith dialogue as a dimension of the Church’s evangelizing mission.”⁷¹ Moreover, he cites the papal exhortation *Evangelii Nuntiandi*⁷² pointing to the other religious traditions only as “beneficiaries of the Church’s evangelizing mission”⁷³ and that evangelization is mostly “conceived in terms of the ‘proclamation of the Gospel and the Church activities connected with it.’”⁷⁴

⁶⁶ Ibid, 222.

⁶⁷ Pontifical Council for Inter-religious Dialogue. *Dialogue and Proclamation*.

⁶⁸ Dupuis, 388.

⁶⁹ Ibid, 357.

⁷⁰ Ibid, 358.

⁷¹ Ibid.

⁷² *Evangelii Nuntiandi*. Apostolic Exhortation of Pope VI on Evangelization in the Modern World (Rome: December 8, 1975).

⁷³ Dupuis, 359.

⁷⁴ Ibid.

To have a fruitful and meaningful inter-faith dialogue, Dupuis requires that parties should remain committed in their own faith, “not allowing any compromise or reduction of their faith.”⁷⁵ However, this should not obscure the conviction of other faiths as well as this dialogue which takes place “between equals – in their difference.”⁷⁶ Dupuis adds that while the dialogue “forbids the toning down of deep conviction on either side, so its openness demands that what is relative be not absolutized.”⁷⁷ In other words, dialogue requires both commitment to one’s faith and openness to the other.

Moreover, Dupuis does not believe that in dialogue, conversion to another faith is a necessary consequence. “Neither on one side nor on the other does it tend to the ‘conversion’ of one partner to the religious tradition of the other.”⁷⁸ Rather, in their dynamic interaction, they can mutually enrich one other in their differences and similarities; this is what Dupuis calls “mutual complementarity.”⁷⁹

Since both Christianity and other religious traditions can be complementary witnesses to each other, Dupuis further believes that an “actual convergence through dialogue is possible,”⁸⁰ taking place “in the fullness of the Reign of God.”⁸¹

In the final analysis of inter-religious dialogue, Jacques Dupuis looks at “the common conversion of Christians and the member of other religious traditions to the same God – the God of Jesus Christ – who calls them together by challenging the ones through the others.”⁸²

Summary

It is a fact that this present age has precluded isolation not only with individuals, but also with cultures and religions. The Church, mindful of this changing time, opened her doors to other faiths in Vatican II. She gave importance to dialogue among faiths while citing her duty to proclaim Christ without fail.⁸³ However, while it is easier to share human experiences and talk about human development, other religions find it hard to accept the identity of Jesus as traditionally understood by

⁷⁵ Ibid, 378.

⁷⁶ Ibid, 379.

⁷⁷ Ibid.

⁷⁸ Ibid, 383.

⁷⁹ Ibid, 389.

⁸⁰ Ibid.

⁸¹ Ibid.

⁸² Ibid, 383.

⁸³ Pontifical Council for Inter-religious Dialogue. *Dialogue and Proclamation*.

the Church. Theologians thus proposed various paradigms that could somehow accommodate their concern.

First, some proposed to have a firmer grasp of the Church's understanding of Christ as the sole and exclusive manifestation of God to man, the criterion by which all religions should be evaluated (Exclusivism). Secondly, some who felt restricted in the first paradigm, proposed to acknowledge the faith of the non-Christians having a potential saving value as "preparation of the Gospel," while maintaining a mysterious relationship with Christ (Inclusivism). Thirdly, others who recognize the plurality of religions in the world proposed in a radical way to perceive Christ as only one among the many mediations and manifestations of God (Pluralism).

Jacques Dupuis, in his desire to bridge these paradigms accordingly, came out with his Trinitarian-Christological paradigm. In his paradigm, he proposed to look at the workings of the Logos and the Spirit, apart from the historical Jesus, in various religions and culminating in God's incarnation in Christ. In Dupuis' understanding, this paradigm would finally recognize the various roles of religious traditions in God's saving plan, while maintaining the unique role given to Christ. Thus, for him, this paradigm will pave the way towards greater possibility for an inter-religious dialogue between the Church and other religions.■



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